THE HISTORY OF

ROCK

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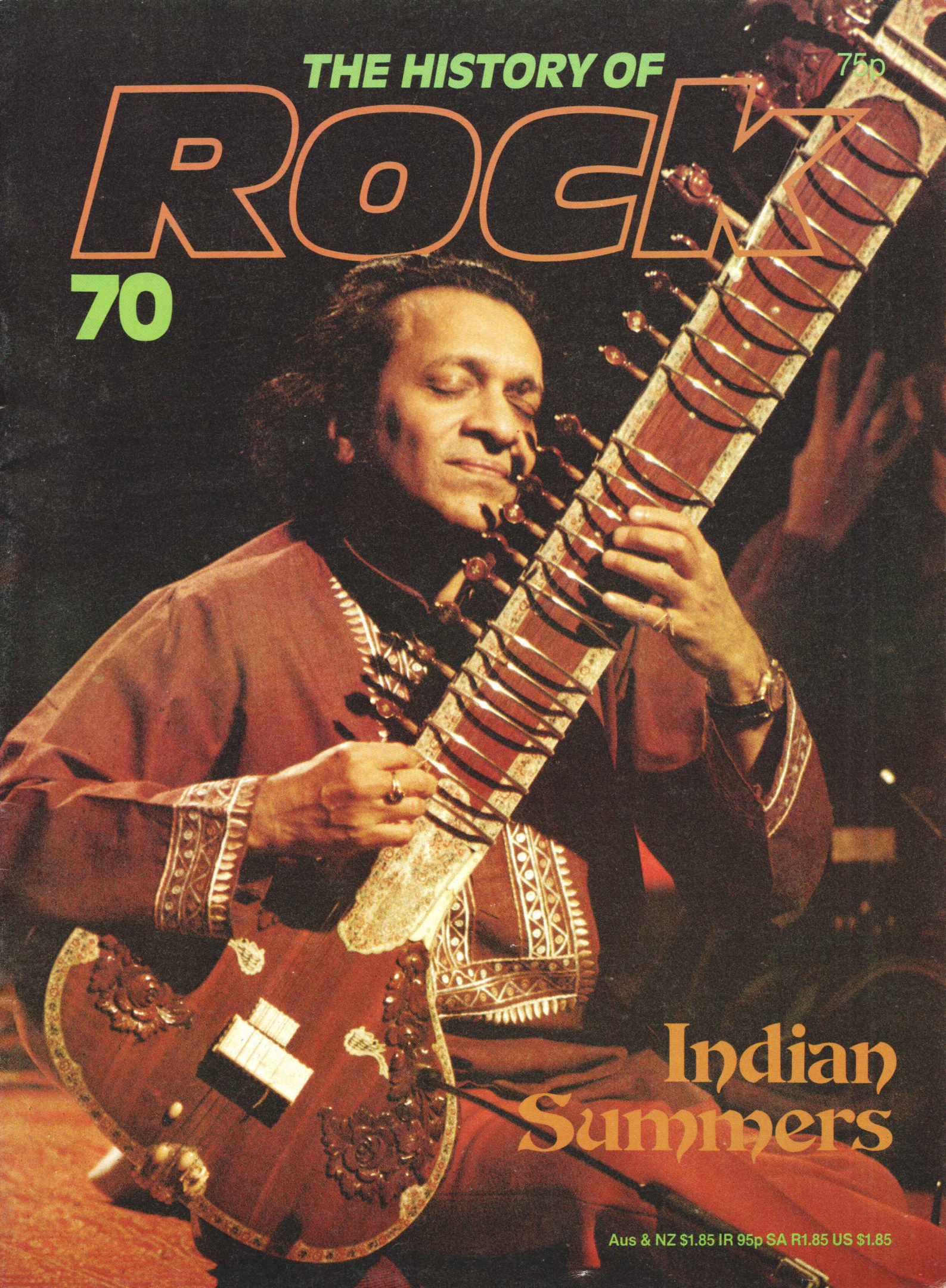

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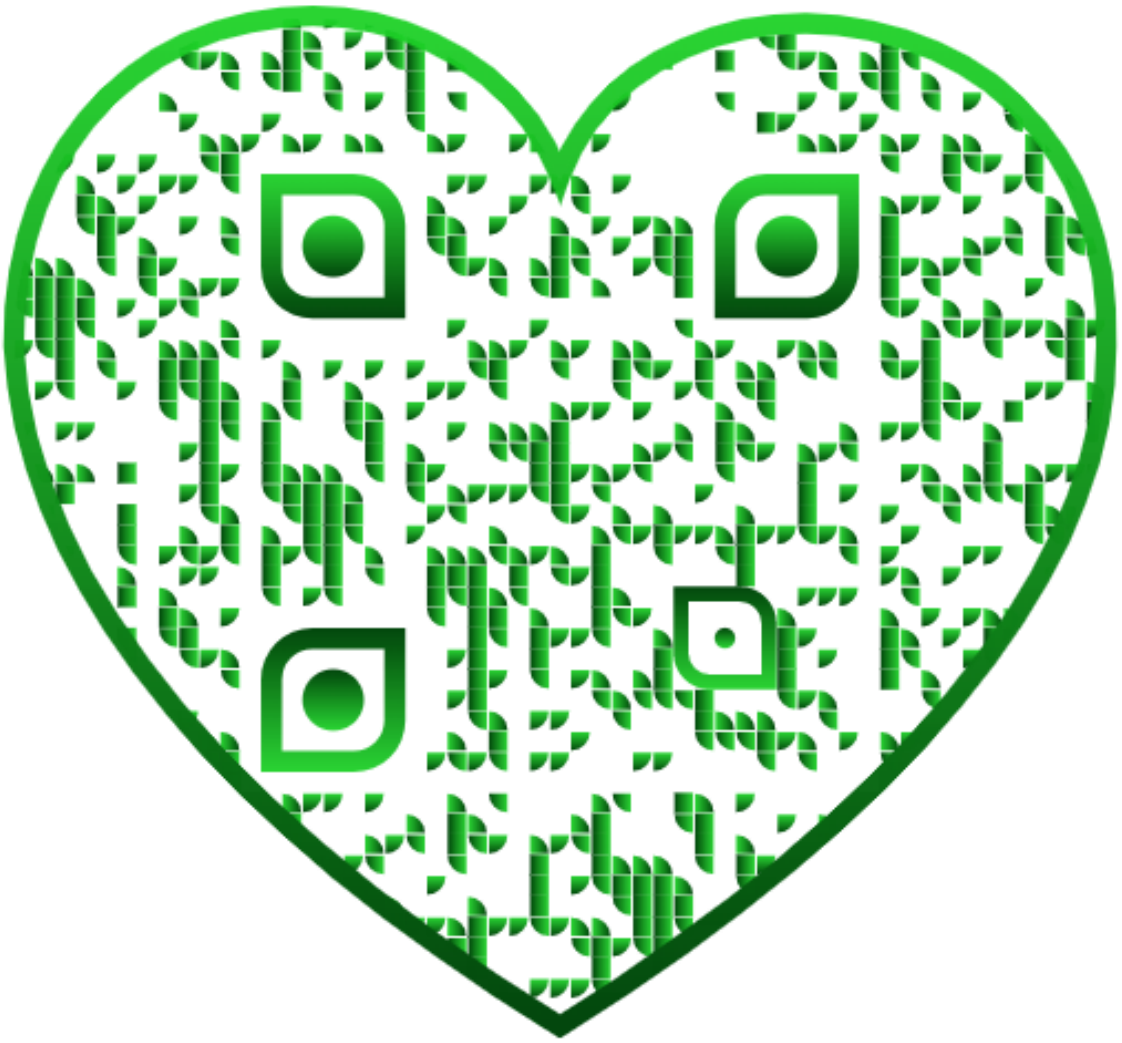

THE HISTORY OF ROCK

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If black music was the real father of rock, then later generations of black musicians have not been averse to borrowing from the styles and trends of their white counterparts. In the late Sixties they did so with a resourcefulness that gave black music a strong new impetus. Absorbing psychedelia and even white blues, slick, soulful male artists like Sly Stone, Isaac Hayes and Curtis Mayfield, and all-girl groups like LaBelle, created their own hot sounds and ushered in the age of the black superstar.

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Turn on, Tune in, Drop Out

Rock music and LSD were the opiates of the West's new young consumers

THE EARLY SIXTIES saw two or three years of spectacular economic growth in the West. In particular, the increase in world trade at the beginning of the decade was unprecedented in modern times, more than matching the increase which marked the great days of Empire in the first dozen years of the twentieth century.

Inevitably, the mood of the period reflected the changed circumstance of economic expansion. A new liberalism spread across Europe and America as more money, more leisure time and a greater variety of goods and services became available to people. The relatively narrow horizons encouraged by austerity and Cold War paranoia in the Fifties broadened under the influence of cheap travel, new and powerful communications technologies and the pressure of industries seeking new markets.

In Britain, the satire boom, the Profumo affair, the popularity of the Beatles and a revolution in fashion, spreading from small boutiques in Carnaby Street and the King's Road, all heralded profound changes in mass society. Old attitudes and stale traditions were being swept aside as rampant consumerism encouraged a sense of experimentation and freedom in sexual morality, clothes, hairstyles, music, art and politics.

In the United States – where conditions were significantly different – the changing mood of the early Sixties was evidenced by the growth of folk-protest music, the increasing acceptance of 'beatnik' ideals, the burgeoning appeal of modern or 'cool' jazz and the birth of the radical student movement. Towering above all these, perhaps, was the fact of John F. Kennedy's election to the presidency in 1960.

In the president's steps

Kennedy was young, good-looking, apparently liberal and – a first for the US presidency – a Catholic. As many commentators have noted, Kennedy's assassination in 1963 provides at least a partial explanation of the Beatles' subsequent success with younger generations in America – they stepped into the vacuum Kennedy left and came to symbolise everything that the president had once symbolised: youthfulness, success, good-humour, good looks, playful boyishness, innocence combined with native cunning, hope for the future and a crucial unconventionality. And if it's argued that the Beatles were a group, then Kennedy had his family, his brother Robert, his elegant wife Jackie, his courtiers and his Camelot.

With Kennedy and the Beatles, the line between politics and showbiz became all but invisible. Both seemed to represent a new and popular urge to democracy and the overthrow of restrictive national boundaries. And rock – accepted as the form of showbiz for the young – was the perfect vehicle for the aspirations of those who were beginning to see themselves as the first settlers in a Brave New World. The possibilities were seemingly endless.

High-school autograph hounds surround John F. Kennedy in Milwaukee, 1960. Kennedy's election to the presidency that year seemed to symbolise the changing, youthful and optimistic mood of the times.

Indeed, rock music's role in the changing mood of the Sixties can hardly be overestimated. The new electronic technologies that shaped rock and grew up on its back helped create new patterns of consumption and new styles of music. Fifties rock'n'roll was relatively unsophisticated in its aspirations, but, by the time Phil Spector was producing his 'little symphonies for kids' with the Ronettes and the Crystals, rock had developed a sense of its own artistic potential. Developments in broadcasting, recording and amplification technology would help fulfil this potential, while the widespread availability of cheap hi-fi (also made possible by rock's enormous popularity) gave rock artistic credibility by enabling the private consumption of crafted work.

Perhaps even more significant was the way that rock tied in with radical politics, becoming an instrument for stirring the consciences of the young. Consumerism created its own contradictions. In making ideas and technologies widely available for the sake of profit alone, it was unable to discourage more radical ideas and the use of technologies in a struggle against the profit-system.

The key figure in this process in the early Sixties was undeniably Bob Dylan, who had renounced rock'n'roll at the end of the previous decade to pursue a more 'committed' kind of music. Dylan's involvement in the early Sixties' movement for black civil rights made him a political figure. But that movement – like the anti-Vietnam War movement that followed it – was essentially a part of the same general process of liberalisation that lay behind Sixties consumerism.

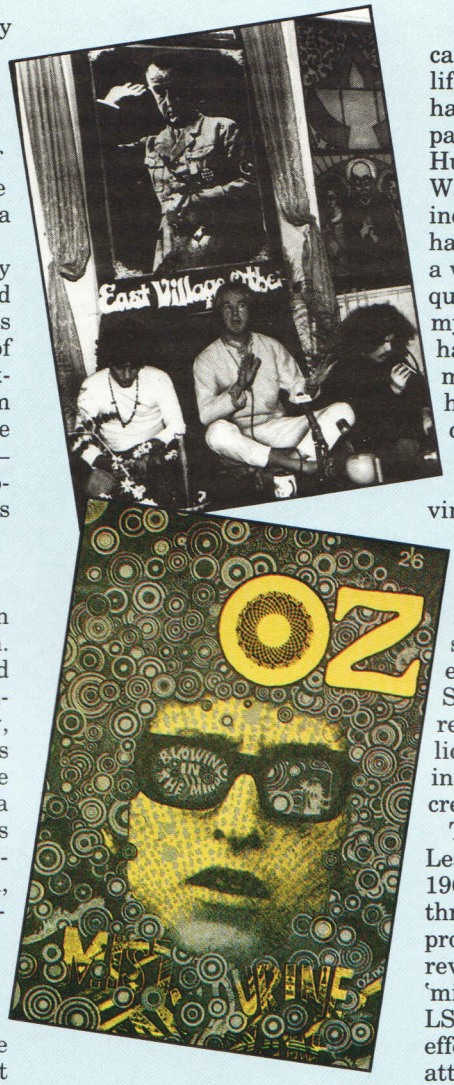
World of hope?

One of the crucial aspects of this liberalisation was that it confirmed the end of imperialism. From the beginning of the Sixties, Third World cultures were no longer reviled as alien, inferior and merely exploitable. On the contrary, they were promoted (at least, in public) as exotic, interesting, future partners in the worldwide adventure of industrialisation. On a more superficial level, the East was famed as the source of spicy foods, colourful clothes, profound ideas and fascinating art – all of which, in one form or another, could be gainfully exchanged for dollars and pounds.

Although overt imperialism was at an end, this did not deter Western nations continuing to exploit and oppress former colonies and colonised peoples. The American blacks were such a people, and the Civil Rights movement was seen as an essentially anti-imperialist struggle. Blacks became 'Afro-Americans', some converted to Islam and many argued for a future independent of – even separate from – white America. The Vietnam War, too, was seen as an anti-imperialist struggle; as the Sixties progressed, supporters of the struggles of such colonial peoples – whose ideas had been allowed free range in the liberal atmosphere of an expansionary West – began to see that very expansionary West as an ogre.

Dylan and many of his contemporaries turned that message into song. They promoted their vision of a better world in terms that pitted the values of industrial, urbanised societies against the 'more human' values of (a probably imaginary) Third World and rural peasantry. Folk music, country blues, marijuana, Tibetan bells, Indian incense, Islam and Buddhism all became fashionable, as did many other products of Third World and rural societies. These were the overt symbols of opposition to the oppressive technocracy of the West.

Dylan – who turned the Beatles on to marijuana in 1964 and thereby opened at least one set of floodgates – was canny enough to understand technology's contradictory nature. His going electric in 1965 seemed a sell-out to many radicals and folk musicians, but it was, for Dylan, a route to vaster audiences than any traditional folk musicians could previously have dreamed of.



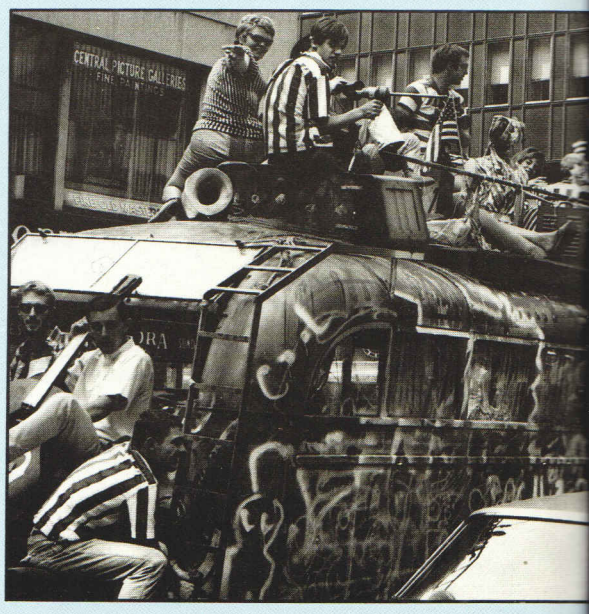
Top: At the court of the acid king – the messiah of LSD, Dr Timothy Leary (centre) holds forth while Yippie activists Abbie Hoffman (left) and Jerry Rubin turn on and tune in. Above: Oz *magazine, launched in London in February 1967 by Australian Richard Neville, was a colourful (and often illegible) mixture of radical politics, hippie philosophy, drugs, music, cartoons, psychedelic graphics and pornography. Along with* IT, *the paper helped give a united voice to the London underground scene until it ceased publication in the early Seventies.*

Into this ferment of new music, political radicalism, colourful clothes and unconventional lifestyles stepped LSD – the most powerful hallucinogenic drug known. Through the patronage of people like the novelist Aldous Huxley and the philosopher of religion Alan Watts – as well as a number of experimentally-inclined psychiatrists and psychologists – LSD had already gained something of reputation as a wonder drug. Huxley and Watts promoted a quasi-religious view of LSD, linking it to mysticism and the ancient ritual use of other hallucinogens such as the psilocybin ('magic') mushroom, mescaline and hashish. Others had investigated the drug's use in more mundane problem-solving or therapeutic contexts. Those who had come across LSD by the onset of the Sixties were inevitably convinced of its potential for changing human awareness on an individual level.

The single most important thing about LSD, however, was that it was a synthetic substance – a technological product which seemed to have profoundly humanising effects. Here was the acute contradiction of Sixties economic expansion embodied and resolved in an odourless, colourless, tasteless liquid: LSD was a mass-produced commodity in the exclusive service of the spiritual and creative lives of human beings.

The drug's messiah, psychologist Timothy Leary, was sacked from Harvard University in 1962 for spreading the LSD gospel. Travelling through California, Mexico and New York, he propounded his philosophy of 'the psychedelic revolution' (the term psychedelic – literally, 'mind manifesting' – was coined by an early LSD-experimenter to describe the drug's effects). Leary left a trail of converts whose attitudes to LSD's 'consciousness-expanding' possibilities varied from the playful to the deadly earnest. Almost everybody who came in touch with LSD in those days did take one of Leary's messages at face value: 'turn on, tune in and drop out' became the slogan of the age.

A common effect of the drug was to heighten the senses and break down the barriers to perception. Colours would glow, sounds would linger and resonate; sometimes one stimulus would provoke quite an unexpected response so

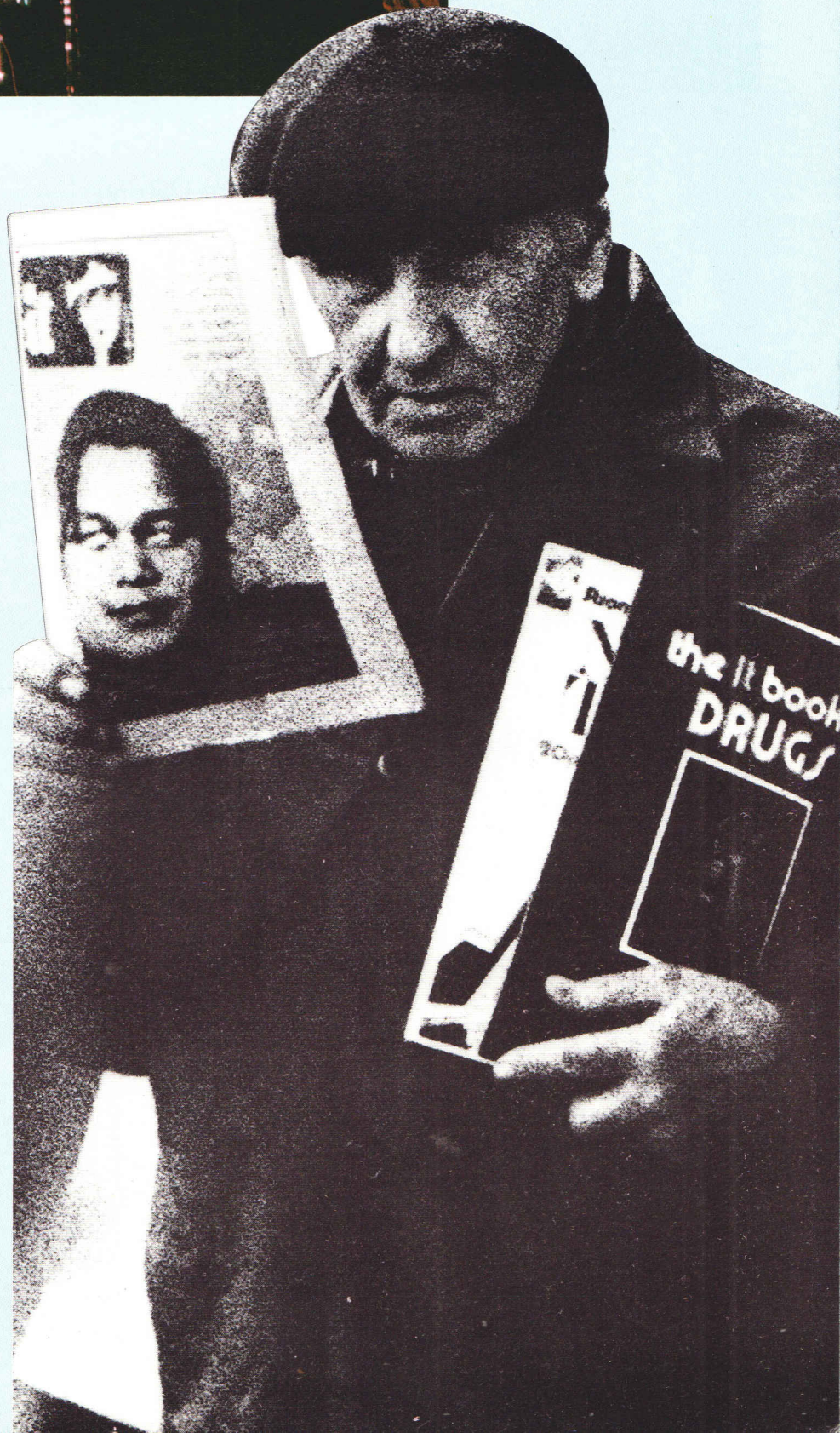


Bottom left: The Magic Bus of Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters takes to the streets of New York, June 1964. Left: At the Fillmore East, Procol Harum play before a psychedelic lightshow designed to simulate the visual LSD experience. Below: An ageing hippie peddles underground tracts, London, 1973.

that music would become translated into imagined visions. Rock music – loud, simple, often repetitive and highly rhythmic – became the favoured soundtrack for the LSD 'trip'. New performers emerged in the 'Acid Tests', 'Trips Festivals', 'Be-Ins' and 'Freak-Outs' that started in the mid Sixties as anarchic events to occupy the sensation-hungry tripper through an eight to twelve-hour experience. These performers – notably the Grateful Dead in America and Pink Floyd in Britain – cultivated a style which depended on simple chord structures, massive amplification and much repetitive improvisation. Their performances were often accompanied by light shows using slides, spotlights and bits of film, and audiences were encouraged to dance, wear make-up and flowing clothes and generally pursue as many different stimuli as possible.

By 1967, LSD itself had been made almost universally illegal. Yet the psychedelic lifestyle was in full swing, a rendered-down liquor strained off from the casserole of economic expansion, the resurgence of rock and LSD itself. Indeed, psychedelia was most significant as a popular fashion towards the end of the Sixties, when beads, bells, paisley shirts, cut-rate Eastern religions and flower-power pop finally found their niche in the expanded marketplace.

GARY HERMAN



GENERATION LANDSLIDE

WHO LISTENS TO ROCK – and why? Such general questions are difficult to answer in specific or useful terms, and yet the answers are essential to an understanding of how the music has developed. Almost any generalisation can be refuted by concrete examples. Was the Fifties audience for rock'n'roll essentially working class? If so, how to explain the boys at boarding schools religiously hoarding Jerry Lee Lewis records? Is rock's essential appeal connected to youthful rebellion? Then why were the Beatles cleaned up and rendered acceptable to everyone before they hit the top?

Both social and psychological generalisations about the rock audience are fraught with pitfalls. But there can be no doubt that, however indefinable, a rock audience can be perceived. Between the early years of rock'n'roll in Britain – 1956 and 1957 – and the heyday of progressive rock in the years around 1970, there undoubtedly took place a major change in the numbers of people who listened to rock, and in the social acceptability of the music. During that time the rock audience grew from being a relatively small part of the population – teenaged and essentially working-class or lower-middle class – into being a very large and wide-ranging part of the population.

Rock's teenage wasteland became common ground

This broadening of the audience has a complex relationship to the development of the music. At one level, the audience's response to the music was passive, if often unpredictable – few involved in the early bouts of Beatlemania could have anticipated that the response would be so overwhelming. On another level, the audience defined and directed the music. Groups that did not appeal to a mass audience inevitably did less well. The audience was a breeding ground for new artists, and many of the constantly emerging groups started out as fans. Thus the relation between audience and artists was often reciprocal.

The rock tribes

Certain aspects of the rock audience stayed the same, of course, from 1956 to 1970. Probably the most important of these was that rock provided an excellent method of group identification for various sections of youth – as did clothing, slang, and even certain patterns of violence. The three most obvious of these groups were the Teddy Boys, the Mods, and the Skinheads.

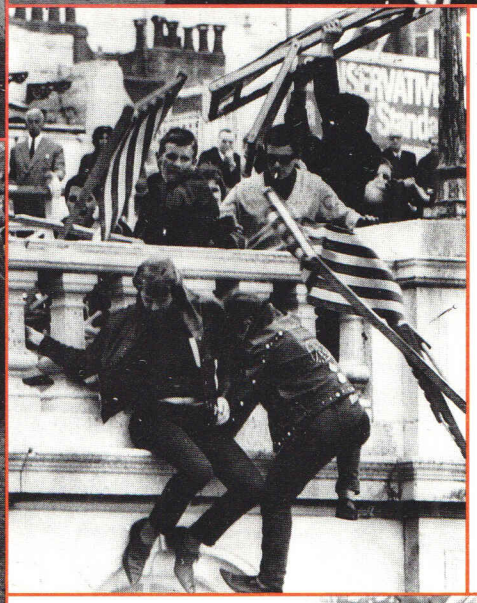
It is usually assumed that the Teds were a product of rock'n'roll, but their arrival on the streets of London's working-class areas like the Elephant and Castle pre-dated the rock'n'roll explosion by a few years. The Teds were teenage and male, and they affected a style calculated to reflect their instinctive rejection of established authority. They dressed sharp, in flamboyant Edwardian styles geared to transcend their class origins, and which later became stylised in a tribal uniform: drape jacket, tight 'drainpipe' trousers, thick-soled crepe shoes, string ties and long hair greased to pile up at the front.

The Teds were raw and physical in a way that frightened the middle-aged and the middle-class. They were portrayed as an anarchic threat to society, but they were not concerned with revolution, merely a fulsome embrace of the traditional way of having a good time – getting drunk and having a few fights. They fought dirty, in packs, with flick-knives, coshes and bicycle chains, against anyone foolish enough to cross them, against rival gangs, and against West Indians. They were fuelled

Above: Sampling the latest sounds in the local record shop became an obligatory part of the teenager's Saturday afternoon – but the Sixties were to see the jazzy decors of the disc emporia left behind by the progressive rock revolution.

by images that crept across from America, where a similar subculture had arisen, identifying with the inarticulate rebellion expressed on screen by Marlon Brando in *The Wild One* (1953) and James Dean in *Rebel Without A Cause* (1955). As a movement, the Teds at first lacked a rallying cry, but they soon found it in rock'n'roll. In 1955 a film melodrama about the problems faced by teachers in tough American inner-city schools, *The Blackboard Jungle*, boasted as its theme Bill Haley's 'Rock Around The Clock'. When it played in British cinemas, the theme alone was reported to drive audiences wild. When Haley made the film *Rock Around The Clock* (1956) the Teds exploded.

The Mods came from a similar background to the Teds, but were of a different age. They hailed from the suburbs of London, and were mainly working, or, at least, lower-middle-class, but their emergence as a group coincided with a boom in the economy. Money was freer, and the Mods took the opportunity it offered them to bring fashion right down into the teenage market. The Mods were cool and sharp and clothes conscious, admiring the trend-setting of their self-elected heroes, the so-called 'faces'. They sported sharp Italian-style suits, styled hair, coloured shirts, American-army parkas and rode neat, light motor-scooters. They had their own clubs and an egalitarian approach that spawned a rash of their own bands, the greatest of which was the Who. The Mods flirted with the effects of amphetamines and toyed with the decorative delights afforded by make-up – on both boys and girls. By 1965 the Mods



Top: A sedate jazz gig in the Fifties – no setting for rebellion. Centre left: Teds provide their own music in a youth club. Centre right: The Beatles escaped mere fan adulation and helped make rock 'respectable'. Above: The unity of a CND peace rally in London in 1970 failed to overcome the hatred of skinheads for this lone greaser. Above right: Mods get the better of Rockers, Brighton, 1964. Right: Death of the hippie dream?

were becoming the tribe most in sympathy with the time. They set London Swinging with their boutiques, boasted their own TV show, 'Ready, Steady, Go!' and claimed a uniqueness implicit in their great anthem, the Who's 'My Generation'.

Among the old style of rock'n'roll fans, Mods inspired loathing. Many of the former Teds were now getting on a bit, and their successors were a young breed who clung to the purity of rock. Dubbed Rockers, they pushed the anti-social qualities of wearing their hair long and untidy and riding solid, powerful motor-bikes in an aggressive, masculine celebration of rock'n'roll's original rawness. They were the antithesis of the Mods – one group stylish, forward-looking, prepared to experiment with apparently feminine styles, the other retrospective, deliberately untidy and swaggeringly macho. Not surprisingly, when the two collided, as they did at several seaside resorts in the mid Sixties, the result was apt to be bloody. It was perhaps inevitable that the atavistic rockers would not thrive, but the values they championed paved the way for the emergence of the 'hard-rock' or 'heavy-metal' styles of the early Seventies.

Enter the boot boys

By the end of the Sixties, another instantly recognisable tribe was emerging. While on the one hand ordinary working-class kids bought bright, new, manufactured commercial sounds regardless of trend or tribe, and on the other hand students, sixth-formers and old Mods, many now pursuing fashion into the realms of hippydom, advocated increasingly high-flown and intellectual musical ideals, a party emerged that cried 'A plague on all your houses!'

The skinheads, once again, originated in the city suburbs and were working-class. They despised the long-haired excesses of the intellectual school, and listened instead to the seductive rhythms of West Indian reggae and ska. They were austerely plebeian in their fashion, cropping their hair brutally short, wearing straight jeans turned up at the bottoms to reveal provocative 'bovver boots'. Violence was their creed, and they attacked anyone bearing the tell-tale badge of long-hair, rival football supporters, and their own pet hate, Pakistanis. Despite the difference in their dress, their attitudes were reminiscent of the early Teds – a curiously full circle.

As far as rock is concerned, these tribal groups are most illuminating when one considers what they were reacting against – what they most disliked. The Teds hated the sounds of trad jazz, modern jazz and folk music. Partly, no doubt, this was based on class envy towards a dominant culture. Skinheads, too, felt an acute class antagonism towards certain kinds of music – but the music they disliked included much of what was regarded the mainstream of rock.

This change from rock as a minority music to being the majority music involved many interacting processes; but perhaps the two most important were the growth of middle-class interest in rock and the association of rock with large-scale social changes – the thousands who streamed to the Isle of Wight festival in 1970 had little in common with the defensive, violent Teds and Skinheads.

Rock goes to college

Although it would be an exaggeration to say that the middle-classes 'took over' rock in the mid Sixties, there is no doubt that the middle-class influx was the most obvious change in the audience. College students who in 1958 would have listened to trad jazz, or perhaps skiffle or modern jazz, had condemned such sounds to the dustbin of history by 1968. Jimmy Porter, the hero of John Osborne's 1956 play 'Look Back In Anger' – the original angry young man – played jazz trumpet. By the mid Sixties, playing the trumpet would have seemed distinctly unromantic. It was scarcely possible to use the styles of New Orleans jazz to express angst or sexuality in the age of Bob Dylan and the Rolling Stones – the guitar had become the instrument of those youthful preoccupations. One of Dave Brubeck's recordings of the Fifties was *Jazz Goes To College*. By 1970, the emphasis was firmly on rock at college, and the campus social secretary was part of the national network of rock booking.

To a large extent, this middle-class interest in rock was sparked off by changes in the music itself. The vacuous candy-floss

Above: Widening the generation gap – middle-aged officials appear nonplussed as excited Rolling Stones fans take the stage in Holland around 1965. Left: Girl pop fans tend to be less tribalistic than boys, but they know what they like – David Cassidy fans express appreciation, London, 1974.

pop of the early Sixties had certainly been replaced by something much tougher, and generally more interesting by 1965. The R&B and blues influences that Alexis Korner and others had been championing for a decade found its way into mainstream popular music – so musicians like Eric Clapton began to come to the fore, and both performers and audience could see scope for expression – and progression.

On a social level, rock performers were alerted to major concerns – and their lyrics reflected it. The folk boom of the early Sixties would probably have penetrated mainstream rock anyway, but Bob Dylan's 'conversion' to rock set an example to performers who felt they had something political, personal or universal to say – and who subsequently said it with rock music. Even if much of what came out was bogus, false or misdirected, the fact that they did it gave rock the same appeal, or rather the same justification, that had earlier been the province of ethnic, or folk music. Rock became respectable – the Beatles could be compared to Schubert, Mick Jagger could recite Shelley to an audience of thousands.

So, from one angle, it is clear that the rock audience changed; it became more broadly based, more ambitious in its tastes. But this in itself is merely part of rock's close relationship with radical social upheaval, and the assumption that rock was the true music of progress, the music that was the natural accompaniment to growing up.

Years of upheaval

During the Sixties, the confines of Fifties society began to crumble. There had been social change in the Fifties, of course; young people had become politicised enough to form the backbone of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and beatniks, folkniks, skiffle clubs and coffee bars had all been part of the growing youth culture. Such phenomena were dwarfed by what happened in the Sixties, however. From student political agitation leading to riots outside the American Embassy in London in 1968 to a revolution in women's underwear, from the widespread use of illegal drugs to the opening up of higher education, from the sexual freedom encouraged by the pill to the lowering of the age of majority to 18 years – the life of Britain's youth underwent a social revolution. And rock was intimately associated with this revolution, was part of it. Rock stars provided the images that young people wanted to copy; rock music was the inevitable soundtrack of adolescence.

This can partly be explained by the mass media's response to changes in society, and its recruitment of a new generation of writers, broadcasters and personalities interested in rock and dedicated to spreading their ideas. They saw rock as the music that accompanied their rise – and let everyone know it. Then there were those who pushed rock because it was profitable and because the teenage market was expanding furiously; these included a wide range of entrepreneurs and businessmen (as well as dealers and hustlers) both inside and outside the rock industry.

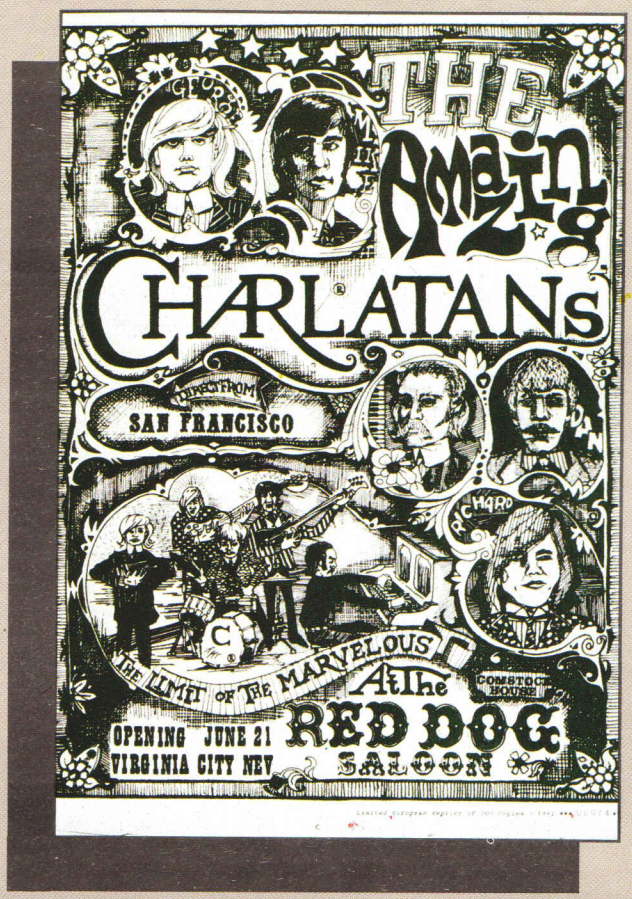
Additionally, musicians themselves felt that they were part of a new world; they identified with it in a way that had been impossible for the likes of Elvis or Jerry Lee Lewis in the Fifties. The Beatles, leaders of popular music and a constantly progressing group (not just an isolated totem as Elvis had become), took their social position seriously, and *wanted* to be part of the general changes that were taking place. They, and bands like them, identified with their audience and felt that they embodied its aspirations. Accordingly, rock was at the forefront of a rampant new culture, and Swinging London – its centre – was an example to the world. In San Francisco, too, in the period 1966-69, rock music trends and youth culture became synonymous.

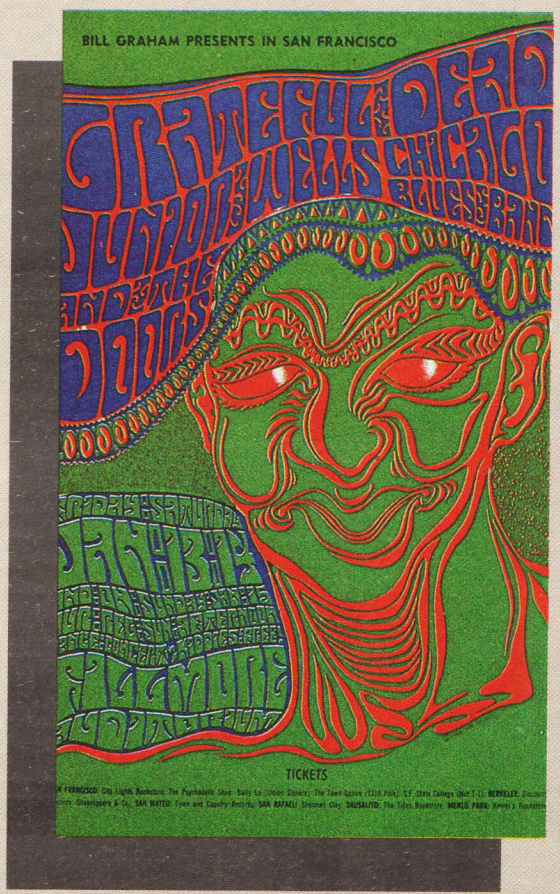
When you're young

These developments were, perhaps, the expression of something deeper. Painting and light shows were an integral part of San Franciscan culture, but they did not take over the world like the music of the Grateful Dead or Jefferson Airplane did. Ultimately, the mass-acceptance of rock in the Sixties resulted from the development of a style, or rather many variations on a common style, around 1962-65, which suited perfectly the vast majority of young people. This audience listened to rock because it expressed emotions with which they could identify strongly; that it was rock that answered this need may have been just a cultural accident, the fortuitous outcome of artists like the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and Bob Dylan being in the right place at the right time.

By 1970, the rock audience comprised almost anyone who was young, excepting those small minorities that were captivated by other forms of music. Not all of this audience was necessarily very knowledgeable about rock, or particularly fanatical about its likes or dislikes. But, indisputably, when the young listened to music, in dance hall or hall of residence, in public bar or public school, the music it listened to was rock. IAN J KNIGHT

Psychedelic Wallflowers





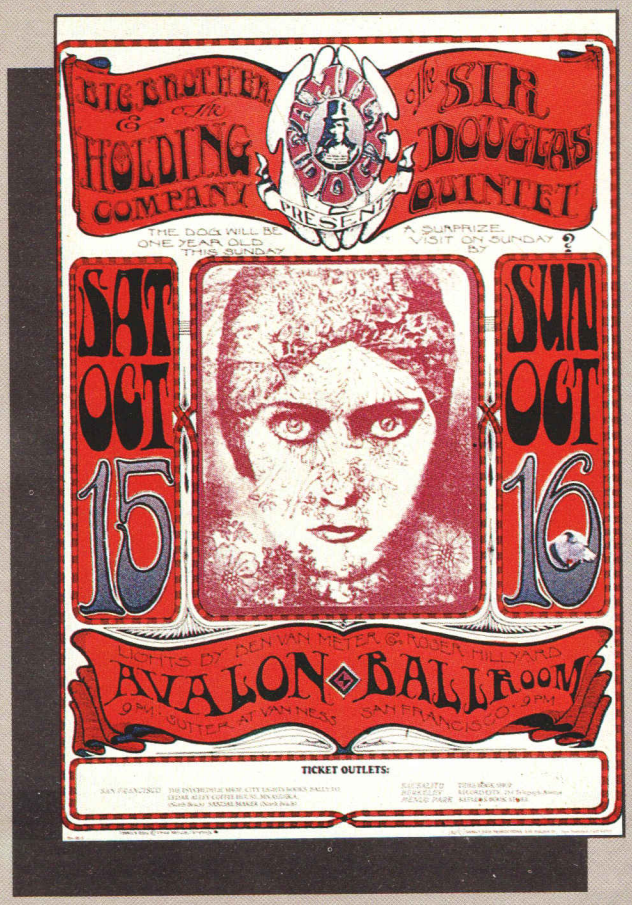
Poster power: the art of blowing your mind

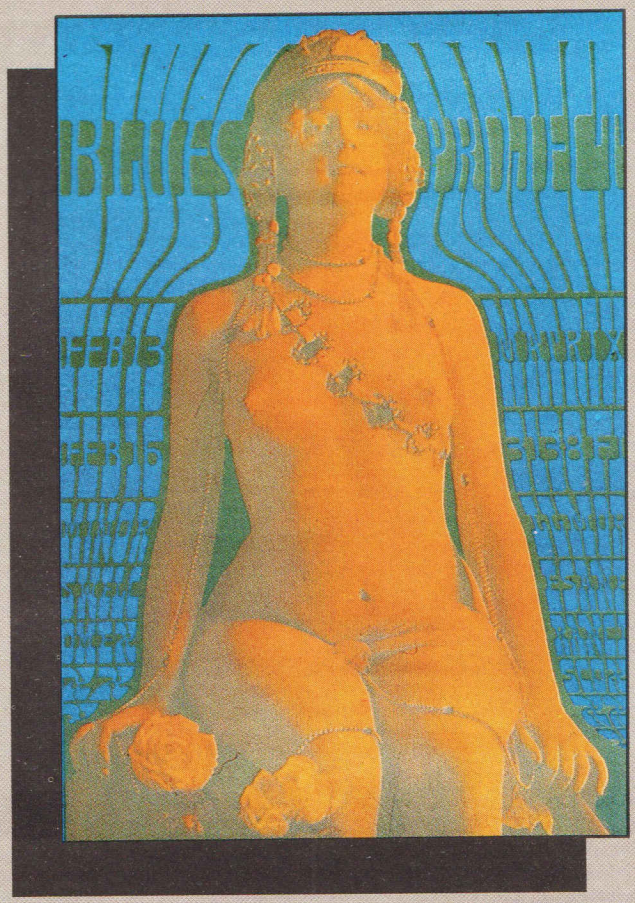
UNTIL THE ARRIVAL of psychedelia in the mid Sixties, rock posters were purely informative. Visually, they were very dull; the headline artist appeared at the top in the largest lettering, the opening act at the bottom in the smallest. The type was uniform, usually black on white, with maybe a dash of red for good measure. Such posters have no artistic value, and any interest in them is either in the names of the artists or the venues at which they played.

By 1964 there was some attempt to make the rock poster look less like an estate agent's auction list, but it was usually restricted to the use of dark-coloured paper and white ink. In the UK, one or two clubs started to experiment with lettering – notably the Crawdaddy, which adopted similar lettering to the famous Yardbirds logo.

Acid art

The rock poster as an art form dates from the beginning of the 'acid days' and comes, not surprisingly, from San Francisco. The first poster in the new style advertised a now-famous gig – the Charlatans at the Red Dog Saloon in Nevada in the summer of 1965. The Charlatans drew their style of dress from a combination of Wild West cowboys and Mississippi gamblers, and they felt that an appropriate poster was required to reflect their image. Band members George Hunter and Michael Ferguson therefore came up with a marvellously dense design, full of different lettering, caricature drawings of the band members and all manner of little eye-catching devices. Like the band's image, it combined the consciously archaic with the boldly original and fresh. Aspects of this





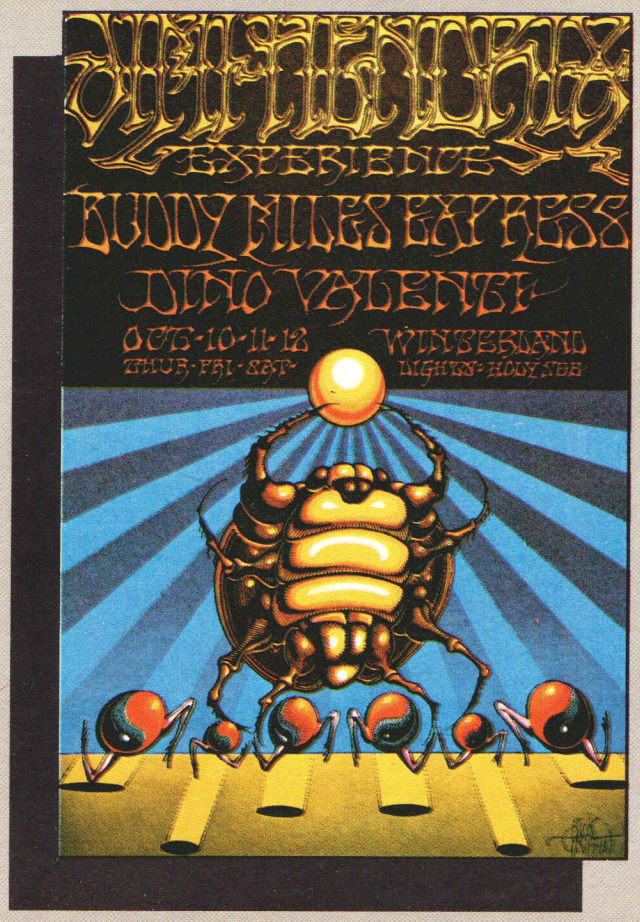
Above, left to right: George Hunter and Michael Ferguson's eclectic pioneering poster for the Charlatans; swirling acid-trip colours from Wes Wilson; movie, Americana and flower-power images boldly used in a poster from the Mouse Studios; sex and Dayglo mysticism make a brilliant effect in one of Victor Moscoso's posters.

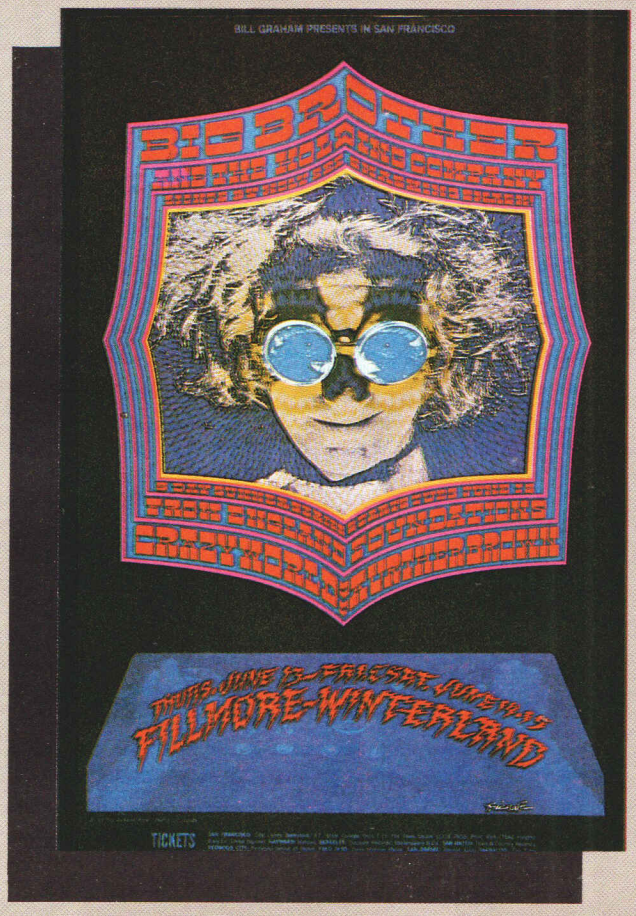
poster influenced the San Francisco artists who became famous in the following year.

By early 1966, when the Family Dog and Bill Graham's organisation were running weekly dances at the Fillmore, the idea of having an exotic poster to advertise the gigs and reflect the nature of the music had taken hold. The first regular artist they employed was Wes Wilson, who became well-known for his original style. His work rapidly became stylised, however – he generally used only two heavily contrasting colours in a central design, surrounded by the group's name in standard lettering.

When the Family Dog moved to the Avalon, Chet Helms started to employ a variety of artists, notably Stanley 'Mouse' Miller and Alton Kelley of Mouse Studios. Their work combined Mouse's undeniable draughtsmanship with Kelley's predilection for collage, and both artists would, as Mouse puts it, 'raid the image bank', getting their inspiration for a central image from books on art and photography.

Towards the end of 1966, the Avalon added another name to the list – Victor Moscoso, a highly accomplished SF artist. He specialised in the hypnotic effects created by weird colour combinations, which made his posters difficult to read but stunning to look at. Moscoso's series for the Matrix Club in early 1967 are among the highspots of the era. Another artist who was commissioned by Avalon was Rick Griffin, who is perhaps best known for the



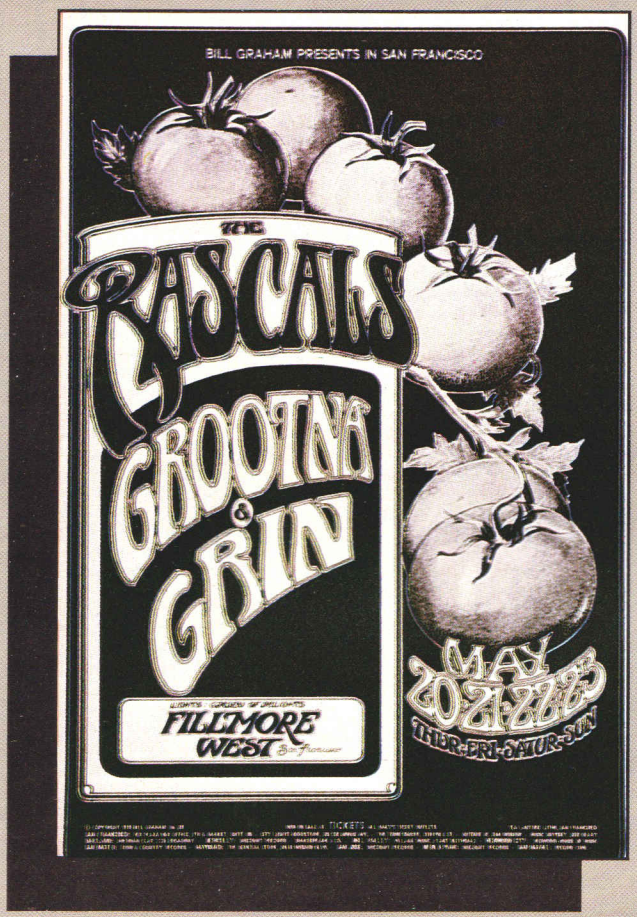


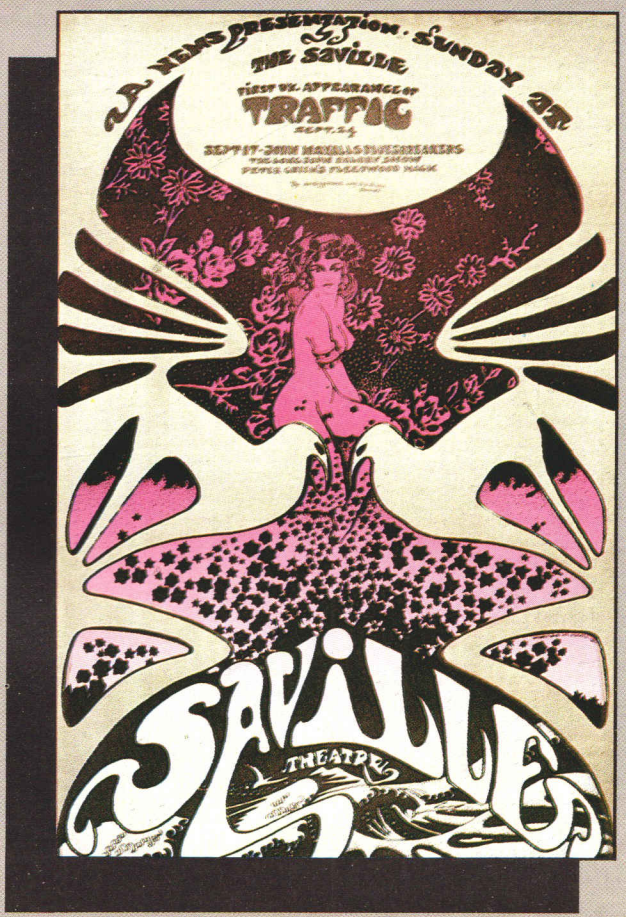
cover of the Grateful Dead's *Aoxomoxoa*, originally an Avalon poster. Less prolific than the others, he was arguably the most talented and witty.

In July 1967 an exhibition by Mouse, Kelley, Griffin and Moscoso was held at a gallery in San Francisco; the posters were no longer merely a by-product of rock, they had become works of art in their own right. In the next three years, these four artists and others almost equally talented, including Randy Tuten and Bob Fried, produced many hundreds of posters for the Avalon Ballroom, the Fillmore and dozens of other smaller venues and one-off benefits; a high proportion of these subsequently became collectors' items. Although they became increasingly sophisticated, they never lost the earthy yet mind-bending quality of the early designs.

San Francisco posters disappeared with the passing of the hippie era. They were intrinsically connected with it and inseparable from groups whose names conjured up psychedelic images, such as Country Joe and the Fish or Kaleidoscope. Mouse and Kelley continued to work closely with the Grateful Dead, the group most evocative of the era, but like the music itself, the style of these posters is a thing of the past.

Other artists in different parts of the United States took their inspiration from the posters produced in San Francisco. In Detroit, Gary Grimshaw produced an excellent set of posters for the Grande and Aragon Ballrooms to rival the best work of Mouse or Griffin. Los Angeles, too, produced some good examples, notably a set of nearly 30 round posters by various artists for the Kaleidoscope Club. In Texas Jim Franklin and Fabulous Furry Freak Bros.





Above, left to right: Resplendent lettering and surreal creatures in a Rick Griffin poster; self-conscious psychedelia from Bob Fried; simpler images and starker colours dramatically employed by Randy Tuten; flowing lines, bird-like images, flowers, stars and a nude poetically combined by Michael English and Nigel Weymouth.

artist Gilbert Shelton designed fine posters for the Vulcan Gas Company venue.

Some of the best of the era came from Britain, from Hapshash and the Coloured Coat, the collective name of artists Michael English and Nigel Weymouth. They produced a series of beautiful silk-screen posters for UFO and the Savile Theatre, as well as promotion material for various bands. Their style was generally more lyrical than that of their American counterparts, but at times maybe just a little too fey and sentimental. Martin Sharp was another truly original British designer, whose swirling Dayglo images also enlivened many early covers of *Oz* magazine, as well as Cream's *Disraeli Gears* and *Wheels Of Fire* album sleeves.

Psychedelic posters vanished even faster in England than in America, largely because the media-inspired 'flower-power' image had become a national joke by the autumn of 1967. Michael English moved on to advertising, and his development parallels the road that rock art took in the early Seventies; posters became slick, sophisticated and very glossy.

Like so much that was good about the mid Sixties, poster art was a naive blend of imagination and talent. The talent may still be there, but the naivety and imagination seem, on the whole, long gone.

JOHN PLATT

Revolutions in Sound

The chaotic development of audio technology

THE WORLD'S FIRST RECORDING was an acappella rendition of 'Mary Had A Little Lamb' by Thomas Edison in December 1877. His device, the phonograph, used a wax cylinder and, despite some serious technical shortcomings, it became the dominant means of recording for the next 20 years. Emile Berliner patented the forerunner of the modern gramophone disc as early as 1887 and immediately plunged the new industry into an often-to-be-repeated situation: two systems, incompatible with each other, were competing for the public's acceptance. The flat, easily-stored gramophone had an intrinsic advantage over the clumsy cylinder and, by the early Twenties, even Edison had lost interest in his original invention.

Turning to the gramophone, he refined the machine's ability to follow grooves and devised a disc that could play back more than a few minutes of music. In 1926 he patented the first 'long-player' (LP); this was 12 inches in diameter, half an inch thick and a hefty two pounds in weight. The disc could be played on one side only and any extended recording required a set or album of records.

Top: Peter Goldmark of CBS who, in 1948, revolutionised the record business with his development of the long-playing 33⅓ rpm disc. Above: An early, disc-playing wind-up phonograph.

Despite these developments, the record industry was still rather insignificant. It is generally agreed that, until the late Forties, record sales represented only a small percentage of the public's entertainment budget. The conservatism of the music industry was one of the major obstacles to the growth of record sales. Songwriters, composers and agents made their money on the sales of sheet music – and record sales threatened to destroy that market. One of the most important factors which changed this situation, and was critical to the development of rock in particular, occurred in 1948.

LP versus 45

In that year Peter Goldmark, working for CBS in the US, solved a major problem for classical music lovers. By slowing down a disc to 33⅓ revolutions per minute (rpm) and taking advantage of new techniques in cutting records, Goldmark crammed up to 25 minutes of music onto a side. Instead of a set of records, the album became a single disc that could play an entire symphony. The modern LP had arrived.

RCA's president, David Sarnoff, who led the competition to Goldmark's parent company, Columbia, refused to accept the LP and responded by developing a separate system. In 1949 he released the '45'. Seven inches in diameter and playing at 45 rpm, it was claimed by RCA to be superior in sound quality to its competitor. Of course, the two systems were incompatible, not only with each other but with all current gramophone players that operated at 78

rpm. While the two companies began a heated battle to win the public over to their respective system, several outside influences began to shape the course of events.

In the US, television was quickly becoming common in most homes. Non-musical radio shows such as 'Gunsmoke', 'Superman', 'Our Miss Brooks' and 'The Phil Silvers Show' switched over to the new medium and radio began to broadcast more music. The widespread opposition of the music industry to the playing of records on the air collapsed: it was at last apparent that massive record sales were possible if a song got played enough and became a 'hit'. Dwindling sheet music sales no longer mattered.

The widespread purchase of televisions was just one aspect of a growing American economy that allowed the average family to purchase new leisure products. This new prosperity also provided the younger members of the family with a 'weekly allowance' – and, for the first time anywhere, teenage money represented a large purchasing power in itself. Whether anyone really understood these factors as they happened is questionable but unimportant. What is important to the development of rock is that at this crucial stage, when teenagers had money in their pockets, CBS and RCA decided to cooperate by combining both the 33⅓ rpm (LP) and 45 rpm functions into a single record player.

Top: An Edwardian family delight in the sound of an Edison wax-cylinder phonograph. Above: An Adam Faith interview is recorded on a small portable reel-to-reel. Below: Leslie Ash, in 1979's Quadrophenia, *re-enacts the ill-treatment of 45s by Sixties teens.*

The stereo revolution

Throughout the Fifties and early Sixties, the primary medium for rock music remained the single, which was well within the average teenager's budget. Albums were expensive, 'adult' and all too often nothing but a batch of old standards surrounding the artist's current hit. A record collection meant a pile of 45s stacked on top of each other, usually with the paper covers long since discarded. Such ill-treatment didn't really matter because the record player and its little speaker didn't exactly give the best aural reproduction anyway.

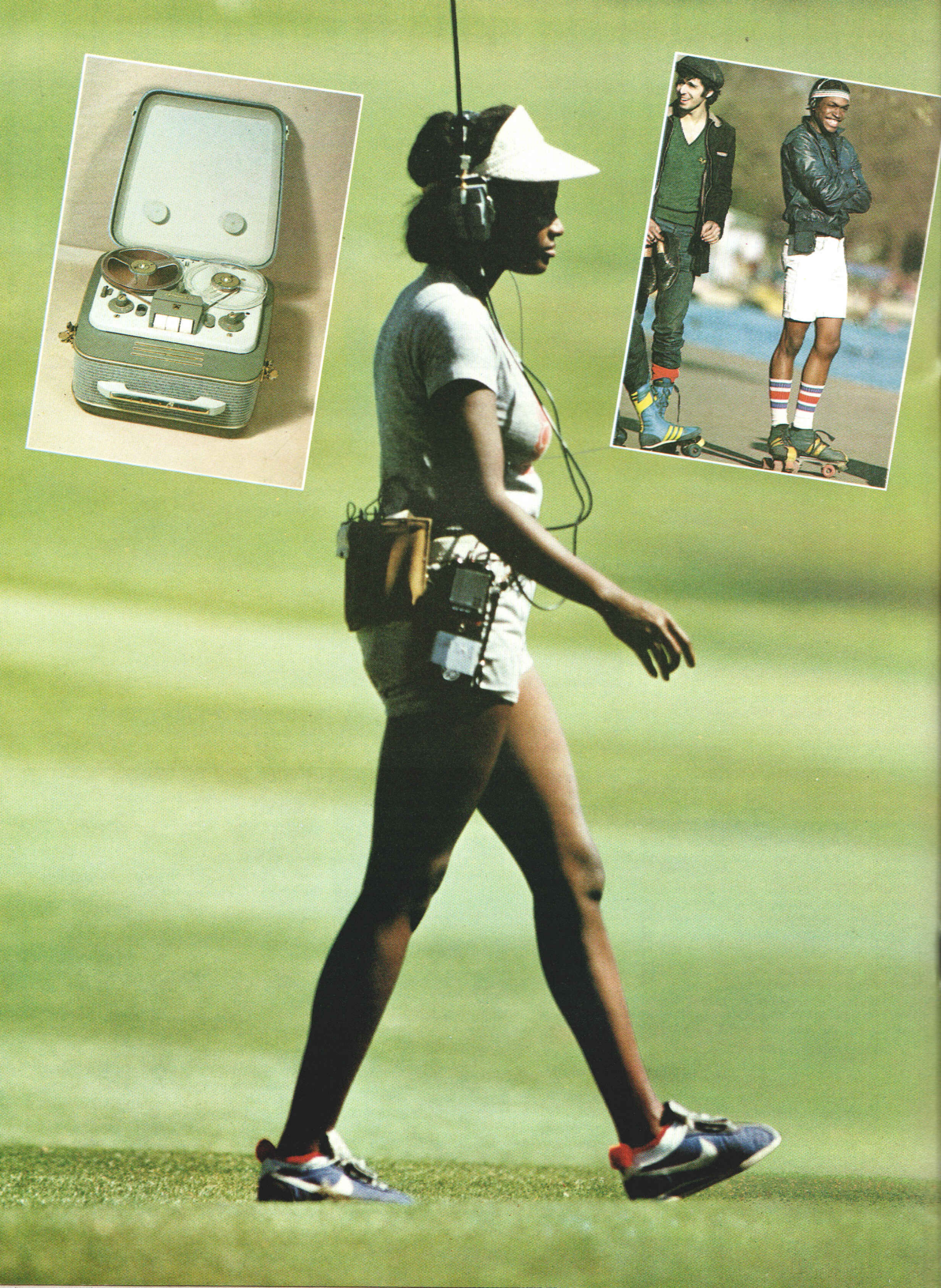
But change was coming as the new electronics industry began to develop the two sides of a record groove to recreate two separate channels of sound. Stereo had, in fact, been invented by EMI in the UK in 1931, but it was not until GIs returned from Japan with cheap and attractively packaged stereo components that its popularity began to catch on. By placing two speakers some distance apart, the audio fan could thrill as a train passed from the left side of his room to the right or listen to a conversation bounce realistically back and forth. For music lovers, stereo meant that the position of individual instruments could be detected, giving the illusion of greater realism.

The music industry was able to react quickly to public enthusiasm and began making stereo recordings readily available. Some popular releases, such as Tommy Edwards' 'It's All In The Game' and the Coasters' 'Yakety Yak' (both 1958), had actually been mixed in stereo long before stereo players were being marketed. Rock was gradually moving towards a marriage with stereo when an unforeseen cultural upheaval suddenly and irrevocably bound them together.

Beatles for sale

One of the most exciting and astonishing things about the Beatles when they burst onto the music scene in the early Sixties was the fact that they wrote their own material. Not only did they write excellent songs, they wrote them in greater quantity than could be released as singles. Right from the start, it seemed as necessary to collect their albums as well as their single releases. As early as the release of *Rubber Soul* in December 1965, the Beatles were producing thematic albums that needed to be heard in their entirety. Other groups followed their example and the American teen market began shifting its emphasis from singles to albums.

There were a few initial problems as much of the best rock music in the mid Sixties was by British bands recording music that was mixed in mono in the UK. Master tapes would be sent to the US to be remixed in stereo, and the results were



often diabolical; Capitol released the Beatles' early material with all the vocals on one side and the instruments on the other, while Reprise mixed the Kinks so that one channel was a slightly delayed echo of the other. At this time some albums were recorded in both mono and stereo, often with considerable differences between the two recordings.

By the end of the Sixties, 'hi-fis' – stereo record players with the turntable, amplifier and speakers boxed separately, with facilities to add tape decks and FM radio tuners – were displacing the old radiograms in many homes. And, since cheap – if unreliable – models were soon available, they also became a fixture in many a student bedsit. As the music abandoned dance for art, the equipment changed, too, from the sturdy mono Dansette to the forbidding cost and high technology of the Bang and Olufsen.

Unlike the gramophone, which was invented and refined by individuals such as Edison and Berliner, the tape deck was developed largely through the work of corporation research teams. Home tapes had made some inroads in the Forties and Fifties when mylar tape replaced the paper tape developed by the Germans during the Second World War. The mylar system was based on a reel-to-reel machine which was expensive and a little too cumbersome for domestic use. Tapes were largely reserved for the studio, where the ease with which they could be edited and mixed made them a natural choice for recording.

Efforts to produce a tape format acceptable to the public date back to the early Fifties. The 3M Corporation had developed a large cassette which was miniaturised by Philips (in Holland), who also slowed the tape speed down to 1⅞ inches per second. Philips made their system available to other manufacturers in 1963, and it has continued essentially unchanged into the Eighties. Meanwhile, US manufacturers were experimenting with a loop of tape wrapped around a single spool – this was the 8-track, and once again the public was presented with two incompatible systems. But the 8-track never really caught on – despite the fact that Ford selected this system for their cars – because of its annoying habit of interrupting tracks in the middle when they exceeded the length of the tape loop.

Quadrophonic sound

Despite the vast improvement over mono, stereo sound is still unnatural to the ear and can seem flat in comparison to live music. The Japanese tried to improve on it by developing quadrophonic sound in which, by using four separate channels of information, they intended to achieve greater realism in sound reproduction. Despite the efforts of the industry to promote quad from 1970 onwards, the concept had flopped by 1974. The expense and inconvenience of two additional speakers and an additional amplifier proved unpopular, while the industry complicated matters still further by producing three competing systems.

Opposite: Home tapes in the late Fifties and early Sixties called for the use of a bulky reel-to-reel (inset left). By the Eighties, portable sound systems had become more compact (inset right). Above: Compact audio disc with laser turntable.

With the growth of the home sound system, it was not surprising that the public came to demand quality in-car entertainment. The miniaturising of separate audio components means that in the Eighties any car can be fitted with a megawatt system. The portable sound system has also become more compact, and it is no longer necessary to walk around carrying a 15-pound stereo pack. Instead, everyone can be 'wired for sound' to a miniature personal stereo without disturbing those around them.

Home-taping

However, the freedom to play whatever you want all the time has had a significant, though little considered, side-effect. Before the cassette, the radio was an important and convenient way of getting to hear new music. But the popularity of selective cassette listening necessarily reduces the opportunity of hearing something new. The result – increased home-taping – may hurt the industry through loss of record sales (although not as much as the record companies claim), but it is, arguably, restricting the growth of rock. As the public spends less time listening to chance selections, it spends less money on new music and the record companies are less willing to take chances on new talent. This makes the radio narrower in what it plays, which further encourages listeners to restrict their choice of music.

Remote control

The average stereo system in the early Eighties embodies many refinements of sound reproduction that have radically changed the way the rock audience listens to music. Radio tuners memorise favourite stations, and with a remote selector the listener need not cross the room to tune to any one of these. The tuner's computer locks in on the station's strongest signal and flashes this selection on the digital display. Tape cassette decks often boast more controls than the cockpit of a Second World War fighter; digital display, memory banks, Dolby b and c and dbx noise-reduction systems, auto-reverse, bias adjustment and track selection are all standard. Turntables may be lateral-tracking, direct-drive and quartz-controlled; at the very least a moving-coil cartridge is included. The amplifier's digital indicators with switchable scale reveal how much power is being put into what set of loudspeakers. These may boast heil-motion tweeters, direct/reflective speakers, passive radiators or any number of other arrangements, while the sound they broadcast may have been passed through a pre-amp, graphic equaliser or sound processor.

As the Eighties usher in the video age, much common ground between sound and vision emerges – and it may well end up a battleground, as the audio world goes video and video recorders are marketed with stereophonic sound. Attempts to miniaturise both audio hardware and the discs it plays continue apace in the search for complete portability, but it would seem that – despite its many faults – the stereo record (in both 33 and 45 rpm forms) will remain in existence for some time to come as the major source of recorded music.

ED HANEL

THE INNER LIGHT?

On the Sixties trail to Eastern enlightenment

'IF YOU APPRECIATE the tuning so much, I hope you'll enjoy the playing more,' said Ravi Shankar at the 1971 Concert for Bangladesh when the audience burst into applause after a couple of minutes warm-up from his Indian band. The incident typified the benign misunderstanding that greeted Eastern music and religion during its excursion to the West in the late Sixties and early Seventies. At the time, however, its influence seemed all-pervading – Eastern concepts like *karma* and *yin/yang* found their way into everyday language. Sitars suddenly appeared on many rock singles, notably the Rolling Stones' 'Paint It Black'. DJ John Peel, sitting in a cramped ship's cabin off the south coast of England, read late night extracts from *The Perfumed Garden* to Radio London listeners. Many young people, particularly at pop festivals, wore colourful, Eastern-influenced clothes, and a group of Hindus, under the name Radha Krishna Temple, took a Hare Krishna chant into the UK Top Twenty.

In retrospect these influences may seem superficial, but in terms of contemporary lifestyle they were revolutionary. Eastern culture, along with hallucinogenic drugs and rock music, became part of a movement that questioned the work ethic, competition and – in rock music – the Top Twenty mentality. It was genuinely believed that it would only be a matter of time before changes in individuals' personalities fostered by this new lifestyle would transform Western capitalist society beyond recognition.

The hippie trail

Travelling, well within the reach of increasingly affluent Western youth, became important, too – not only to get away from a hostile capitalist society but because travelling seemed an important concept in Eastern religion: gurus pointed out that answers often lay in the journey itself rather than in reaching a destination. Young 'seekers after truth' failed to appreciate the metaphorical nature of such pronouncements, and, by the time MP Philip Goodhart pointed out in May 1968 that 'hippies are now, of course, the major British contribution to the Afghan scene', virtually everyone under the age of 25 seemed to be spending part of the year hitching further and further east from Morocco through Istanbul, Ankara and India to Katmandu.

These journeys weren't without difficulties, especially with cash dwindling rapidly on the way back ('And half the blasted idiots are stuck in Yugoslavia/with hardly a dina . . .' chortled Roy Harper on 'Nobody's Got Any Money In The Summer'). Many of the countries concerned, frightened that their tourist industries would be threatened by these scruffy itinerants, began to impose vindictive 30-year jail sentences for trivial drug offences. The travellers pressed on, however, and the further East they went, the greater the resulting influence of Eastern mysticism on Western ideas, music and fashion.

Young Westerners who were unhappy in their own countries tried to settle in Marrakesh, Morocco, wherever took their

fancy. A hippy commune in the crumbling villas surrounding Tangier became like Ladbroke Grove in exile, with house-to-house visiting, picking up supplies of locally-grown hashish and taking odd jobs when money was needed. In return, gangs of saffron-robed Hindus came to Europe and danced up and down the city streets chanting and begging, selling religious books and records to the gullible. Neither group of exiles, in the West or the East, ever made much sense to the native population and, with their blithe disregard of local custom and feeling, seemed often to reinforce George Harrison's perspective in 'The Inner Light' that 'the farther one travels, the less one really knows . . .'

Eastern echoes

Harrison, of course, introduced the sitar to rock; it is difficult to realise just how bewildering it first sounded back in 1965 on the Beatles' 'Norwegian Wood' when most people had never even heard of the instrument. Although at this stage Harrison merely strummed the sitar, before long he and other rock musicians were exploring its possibilities further and studying under Indian musicians like Ravi Shankar. Unlike Western music, where the scale forms the basis of both melody and harmony, Indian music is based on the idea of the *raga*. Each *raga* is a brief, modal melody that forms the basis for improvisation over a continuous drone. As a result, Indian classical pieces tend to be fairly long, and since they are devoid of the chord changes that provide tension and climax in much Western music, this has to be achieved by increasingly intricate solo patterns. The rhythmic unit – or *tal* – on which an Indian piece is based is often long and complex, resembling the 7/4 and 13/8 time signatures that had been employed in some jazz and classical music, and which were about to infiltrate rock.

Under this influence, progressive Western records became so long that Radio One DJ John Peel, whose show used to go out live on Saturday afternoons, was able to slip out to listen to the football results and still be back at his turntable before the track he was playing had ended. Gone were the 8-bar guitar solos in the middle of conventionally-structured pop songs. Instead, lead guitar pieces – often improvised – were like long, stoned meditations that assumed an importance all their own. On tracks like the Grateful Dead's 'Dark Star', the listener was supposedly being offered an apparently spontaneous outpouring of guitarist Jerry Garcia's feelings, and the idea consequently arose that, depending on the 'vibes' from the audience or the guitarist's chemical state, no two performances of a piece were ever quite the same.

Since self-expression was now so important, tuning-up on stage became very fashionable – depending on how stoned the musician was, this could sometimes take longer than the song itself – and celebratory jam sessions, as on Harrison's *All Things Must Pass* album, also became common. At the other end of the scale, repetition became a preoccupation of some composers. Soft Machine performed a particularly repetitious piece entitled 'We Did It Again', which deliberately set out to be boring because, according to organist Mike Ratledge: 'If you find something boring, a basic Zen concept, then in the end you find it interesting. If you listen to something repeated in the same way your mind changes the structure of it each time.' This idea was taken up by Mike Oldfield in the repetitive layers of *Tubular Bells*, while John Lennon had used it in a more accessible way with the loop tapes on 'I Want You (She's So Heavy)'. It wasn't always easy to tell just how serious musicians took this, however; Ratledge admitted that 'We Did It Again' was a piece Soft Machine saved especially for when they wanted to annoy their audience.

Lyrically, terms of reference were set by the Beatles' flower-power anthem 'All You Need Is Love'. Its underlying sentiment – that anything is possible for the individual – was somewhat at odds with the self-effacing lifestyle extolled by Eastern religion, but the emphasis, in both Buddhism and

The hippies (opposite) favoured Eastern thought and were hostile to Western materialism, but this was not without its contradictions. After the Beatles discovered the Maharishi (right), George Harrison had his fireplace decorated in oriental style (below).

Hinduism, on intuition had an obvious appeal for a generation that rejected Western rationalism and regarded the entire educational system as misguided. 'We can miss off school', suggested Steve Marriott in the drug-oriented lyrics of 'Itchycoo Park' (1967), 'Why go to learn the words of fools?' There had always been a rebellious streak in rock, but in the late Sixties it began to flirt with a structured, philosophical view of the world.

The Beatles may have set the general parameters – and popularised the East at a stroke with their trip to India to visit the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi – but others gave lyrics a more specific direction. Despite their antiquity and basic passivity, Eastern ideas seemed in tune with a decade that sought instant salvation, in the same way that, a few years earlier, a demand for instant art in Swinging London had made photography fashionable. *Be Here Now*, the title of a book which became a hippie primer, was also an idea that cropped up constantly alongside lyrics that dealt with the psychedelic experience, colours, the illusion of the real world and the knowledge that all truth is within.

Partly due to Indian influences, styles of writing changed too: images were piled up one on top of another in an attempt to express states of mind rather than creating a flowing narrative. This technique was by no means confined to overtly religious lyrics. King Crimson, for instance, offered 'Pictures Of A City': 'Concrete dream flesh broken skull/Lost soul lost trance lost in hell'. Lennon's 'Across The Universe', the lyrics of which forced their way into his head in the middle of the night, was equally typical of the trend.

The dream-like quality captured in many of the songs at this time was often linked to an underlying principle of the Universe. Robin Williamson of the Incredible String Band, describing his writing technique to *Oz* magazine in 1969,

Below: Ravi Shankar was the musician most responsible for popularising Indian classical music in the West. Inset below left: Quintessence emerged from Notting Hill's hippie community to adopt Hindu names and chant mantras.

observed: 'A year ago I'd have said I was in touch with the spirit that wrote all the songs. I would have said I wasn't responsible for their existence, it was just the music. But now I'm starting to take responsibility for actually creating them.' People actually based their lives around such ideas; Quintessence dressed in robes and sandals, adopted Indian names and chanted mantras that they recorded for their albums. Lead vocalist Shiva said: 'What we are trying to put across in the music is that it is within the grasp of everyone to attain infinite knowledge, love and peace.'

Seeing the light

Many aspects of Eastern religion, however, were ignored – like the proscription of sex and drugs – if they were considered inconvenient. The fundamental doctrines of Hinduism were never really followed. In brief, they hold that all phenomena are manifestations of a divine ground and that the only aim in life should be to reach a full, intuitive knowledge of this divine ground and become one with it. Hindus believe that human beings can penetrate to this divine reality by intuition ('You can penetrate any place you go', sang John Lennon on 'Dig A Pony') and that man has a double nature: a phenomenal ego, which should be disregarded, and an eternal self.

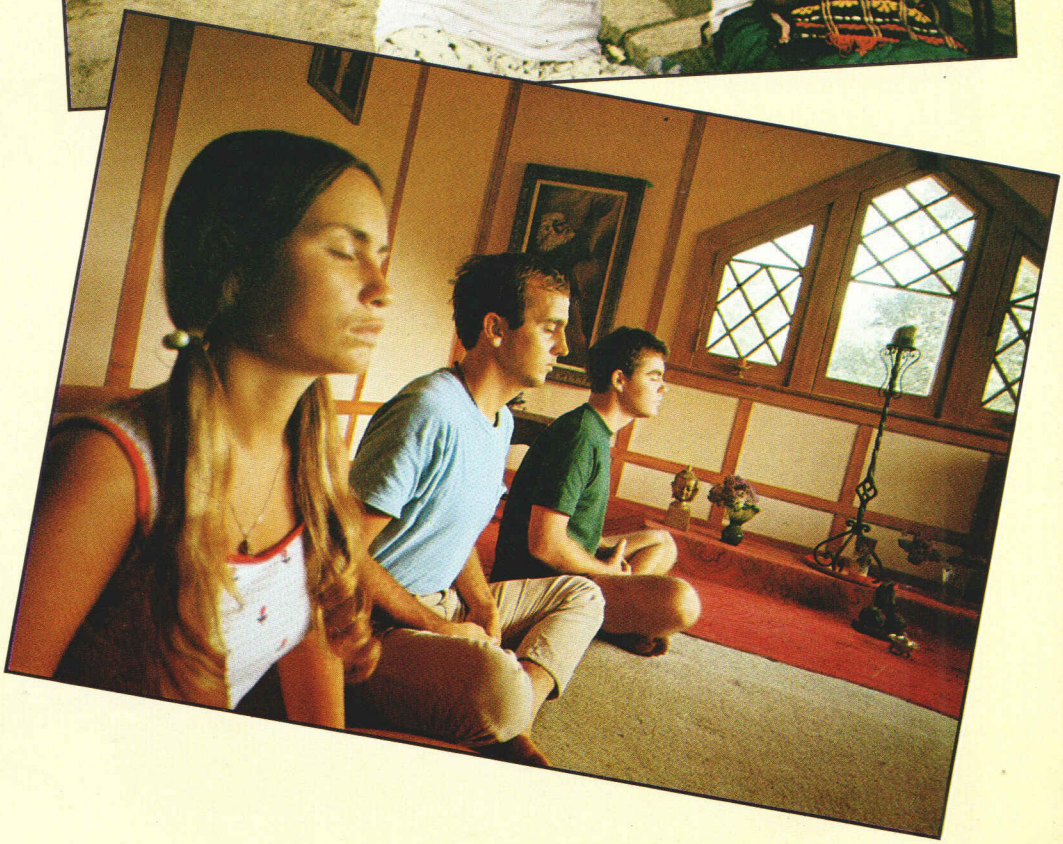
These philosophies led to a vaguely benign outlook that fostered ideas about such concepts as communal living. The belief that the human species is one with all nature tended to manifest itself in a fascination for the children's stories of A. A. Milne (*Winnie The Pooh*) and Kenneth Grahame (*The Wind In The Willows*), as well as fostering a vague interest in UFOs and space travellers. Such fantasy – quite the opposite of a Hindu search for a divine *reality* – became entangled with a general worship of the past (Eastern beliefs were ancient as well as distant) that had little significance apart from heavily subsidising the old-age pension of J. R. R. Tolkien, author of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

Denial of the personality, in practice, often amounted to self-indulgence: rock stars pretended to be gurus and gurus passed themselves off as rock stars (the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi actually went on a bill-topping tour with the Beach Boys) and people wandered around with a dramatic sense of their own importance. Much importance was placed on drug-induced ecstasy, and this was often linked to Zen Buddhism, a cult that became very popular (especially on the West Coast of America) because its teachings allowed for 'accidental' enlightenment. After years of graft the truth might come like a blinding light at an unexpected moment, so why not jumble up your preconceptions with a little acid and make that state of mind more likely?

It was only a short step, therefore, to Timothy Leary announcing acid as a religious sacrament – despite the fact that the eight-fold path (eight essential conditions to reach Nirvana) excluded drugs, which were believed to work against meditation. People giving up tea, coffee and meat but still dropping acid were not uncommon. True seekers of Nirvana were also required to give up all relationships and family as mere worldly illusions to be stripped away. This idea had a certain romantic appeal to a generation that didn't trust adults, but it rarely went further than a few months away on the Marrakesh Express.

The denial of the world in Buddhism and Hinduism was conveniently taken to mean the Western world only. Eastern religion was used to legitimise the hippie revolution – music, drugs and the non-competitive lifestyle – in much the same way as puritanism had legitimised the English Civil War. It provided a moral authority to throw at old people and politicians. Seen from afar, it appeared to be a very attractive religion. But it seemed attractive *precisely* because it was seen from afar, a standpoint that enabled converts to pick and choose their beliefs. The fact that Eastern religion was outside the Western set-up was a great attraction, encouraging

For the diligent searcher after the One Truth, the only path to follow was the long and hard one of prayer and meditation (bottom). Many hippies found a convenient shortcut through drugs like cannabis (below).



the idea of a freak society in exile. It is also interesting, given the political climate of the time, that America was fighting a war in Asia, and adherence to religions popular in Vietnam was an ideal way of siding with the oppressed.

Nothing lasts

The implications of the fusion between rock and Eastern ideas were largely social rather than directly musical. A few communes survived in the Eighties, leading a ragged existence in the hills of North Wales, but perhaps the most significant result has been the growth of the ecology movement. The migration of hippies to the countryside, in an attempt to love and cultivate the earth, stemmed from the Eastern belief that there is one life in all things. Flowers, for instance, have always been a symbol of the divine in Eastern mandalas. This underlying principle of life also discouraged people from eating meat and made vegetarianism respectable rather than cranky. None of these ideas would have gained prominence had they not been aligned to rock music.

At the time, the religious fascinations of the East may have provoked an opposing response in the work of musicians as diverse as Loudon Wainwright III ('Guru') and Jethro Tull (1971's *Aqualung* album), but in the long term they 'legitimised' the stars' individual beliefs. Rock musicians like Pete Townshend and Carlos Santana stayed with their respective gurus well into the Seventies, while others, like Richard and Linda Thompson and Cat Stevens, were converted to Islam.

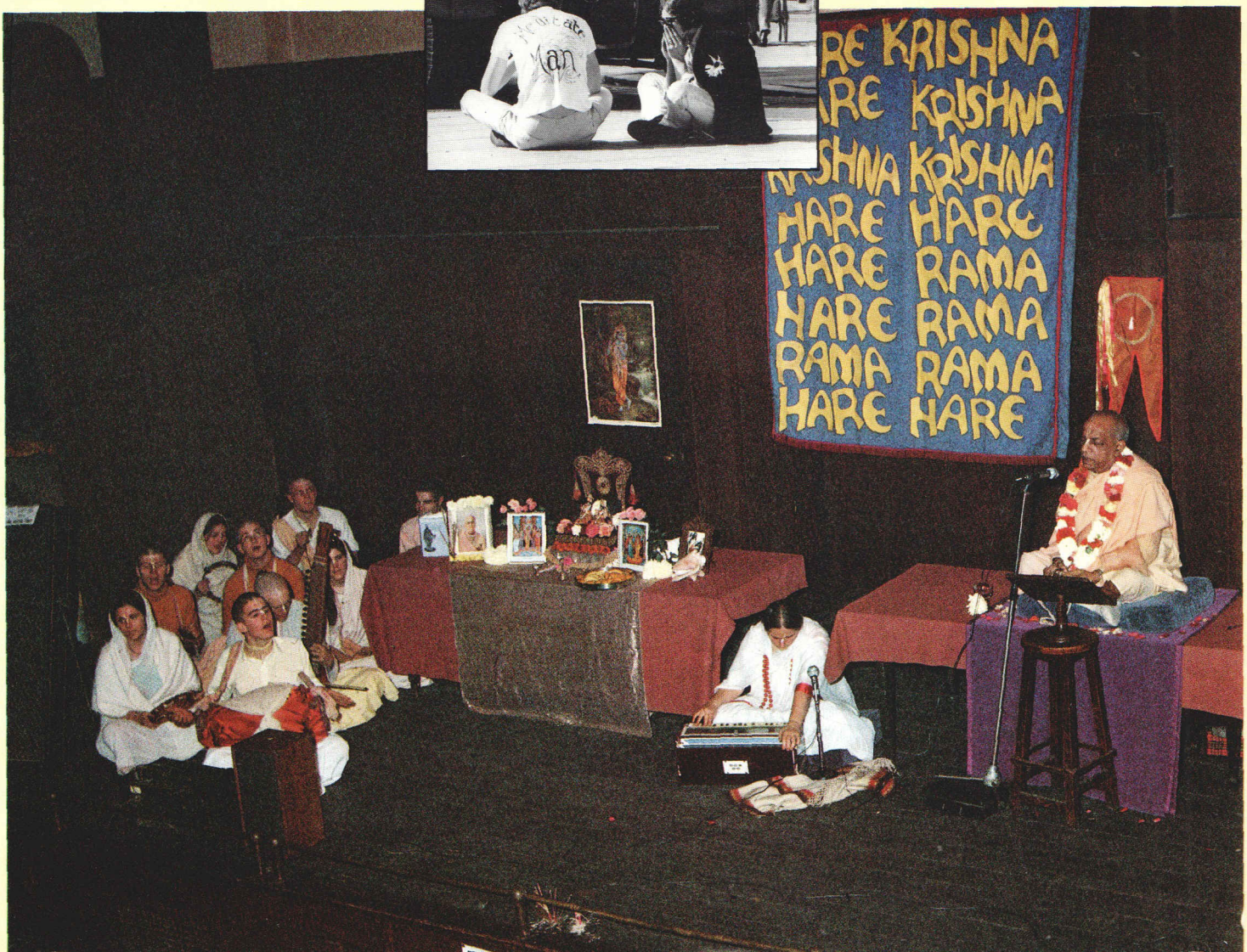
There is also an ever-increasing band of born-again Christians, of whom Bob Dylan is the most famous convert. As for the saffron-robed followers of Guru A. C. Bhaktivedanta, heavily subsidised in the past by George Harrison, they still dance up and down city streets on occasion, but no-one takes them very seriously.

Below: Why don't we do it in the road? The hippies' sublime disregard for the material world could prove exasperating to those less enlightened souls intent on getting to work. Bottom: A service at the Krishna Temple.

For a brief period, however, Eastern ideas gave a revolutionary new lifestyle a certain cultural context and moral authority. They helped music expand its frontiers both structurally and lyrically, and, aligned with drugs, forced people to look at the natural world in a new way. The net result of these years was to destroy the illusion that life is ordered on any kind of logical, consecutive plane – something rock'n'roll always instinctively felt but never had the vocabulary to articulate.

But why, in the end, were there no other far-reaching effects? Firstly, the movement was incredibly naive in its belief that the world could be changed simply by changing people. Moreover, combining a social conscience with a world-denying religion was in effect trying to reconcile contradictory aims and, in any case, it wasn't possible to graft one culture on to another by some kind of cerebral sleight of hand. In the end, the two just didn't fit. Westerners were rarely trying to absorb the real thing, and those who eventually took a hard, close look at Eastern culture – like John Lennon – often found they couldn't bear it. The ex-Beatle eventually had to throw out the group of Hare Krishna freaks he'd allowed to live around his house at Tittenhurst Park because, as he pointed out, only half-jokingly: 'I just couldn't get any bloody peace with them walking around chanting and smiling all the time.'

COLIN SHEARMAN



THE GREAT MUSICIANS

Richard Thompson

Richard Thompson and his wife/partner Linda (above) and in the spotlight with his Stratocaster (overleaf).

Although Richard Thompson's records have sold in relatively limited numbers, it is a token of his reputation both as a writer and guitarist that his name is mentioned with such great respect by many of his peers. His electric guitar work is stunningly effective and highly characteristic; there is little resort to gimmickry; instead, he concentrates on a clean, economical style. For his select number of US West Coast gigs in 1981, the audience was largely composed of musicians and journalists; somewhat unusually, the journalistic fraternity went overboard in their praise: *Rolling Stone* hailed him as 'rock's best-kept secret', while *Time* described the team of Richard and Linda Thompson as 'musicians of formidable gifts and marginal celebrity'. Accolades like those may have been a long time coming, but were richly deserved.

Like thousands of others, Thompson's imagination was fired by the Fifties rock'n'roll epitomised by Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, the Everlys and a host of others. Growing up in England at the time of the Sixties beat boom, he was inevitably subjected to a steady diet of Beatles, Stones, Kinks *et al.* A few years later, the obligatory school groups behind him, Thompson was an apprentice maker of stained-glass windows but, incurably bitten by the rock'n'roll bug, kept on practising. His guitar at this point was 'a Hofner V3 with holes worn through the metal in the pickups', and it was with this trusty instrument that he auditioned for a local group in the throes of reorganisation. Having decided on Fairport Convention as a name, they were initially influenced by the music emanating from the US West Coast.

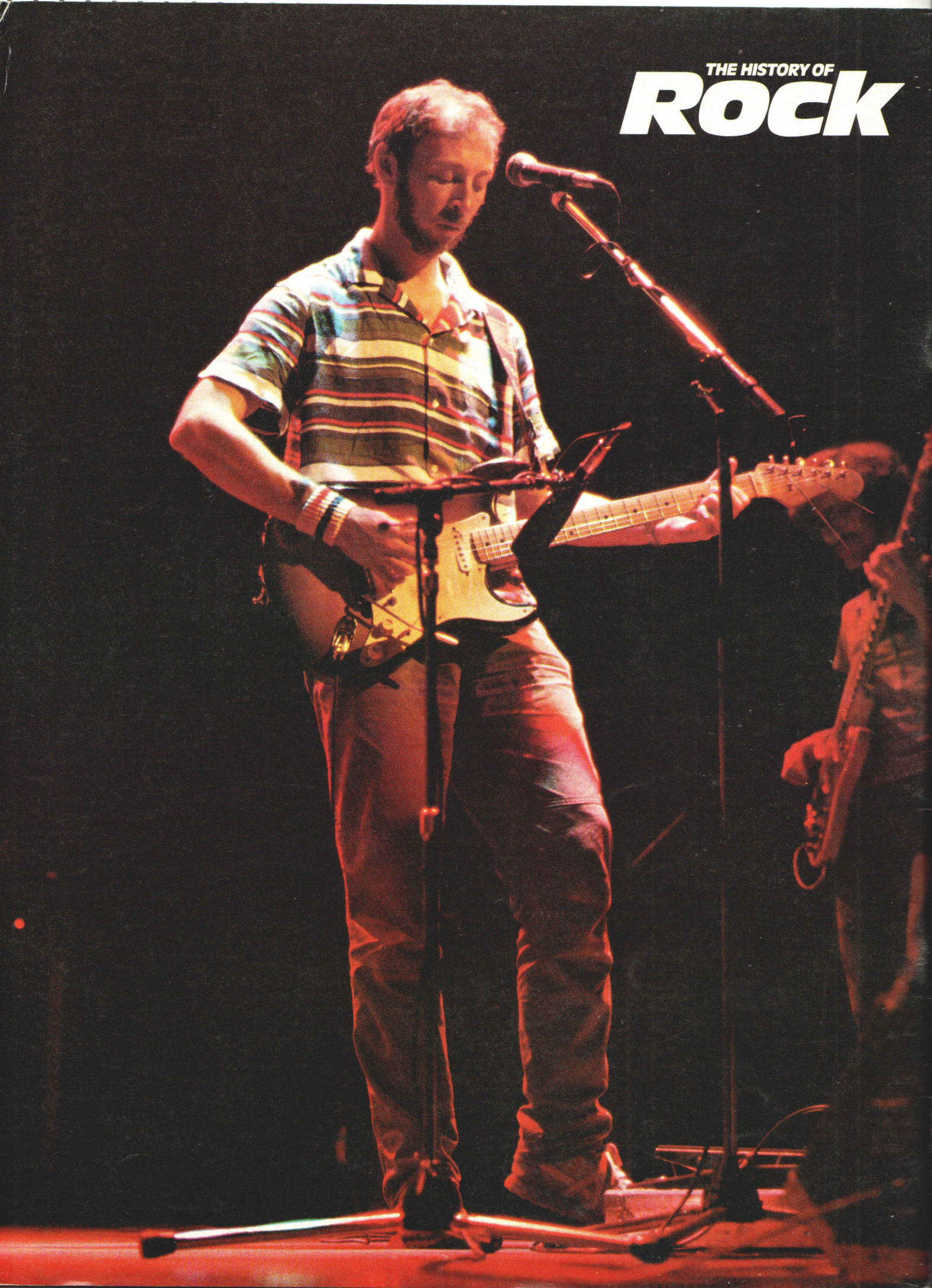
By the time of their third LP, *Unhalfbricking* (1969), the group had metamorphosed into a very different beast. Inspired by its own country's musical heritage, Fairport Convention took on the mantle of England's foremost electric folk-rock band and Thompson's songs like 'Meet On The Ledge' and 'Tale In Hard Time' (from *What We Did On Our Holidays*, 1968) portended a promising talent. *Unhalfbricking* also found Thompson playing superb, evocative guitar on tracks like 'Genesis Hall' and Dylan's 'Percy's Song'. Experimentation with arranging traditional material for amplified instrumentation produced the magnificent 'A Sailor's Life', which featured a lengthy instrumental section in which Thompson's fluid leads duelled with Dave Swarbrick's violin.

Liege And Lief appeared at the end of 1969 and proved to be a milestone in British rock music, inspiring bassist Ashley Hutchings to form Steeleye Span on his departure from Fairport Convention and Shirley Collins to record the masterly *No Roses* (1971), an album that strongly featured Thompson's guitar. His acclaim as a musician would lead to a demand at sessions as diverse as Brian Patten's *Vanishing Trick* (1976), Sandy Denny's *North Star Grassman And The Ravens* (1971) (from which the usually self-effacing Thompson untypically singles out his playing on 'The Sea Captain' as worthy), John Cale's *Fear* (1974) and David Thomas and the Pedestrians' *The Sound Of Sand* (1981).

Ignoring occasional guest appearances, Thompson was to stay with Fairport for one more studio album, *Full House* (1970); his majestic 'Sloth' was a highlight, the extended guitar solo wringing every ounce of emotion from the song. The posthumous *Live At The LA Troubadour* (1976) revealed that Fairport line-up's rare musical rapport and fine sense of humour. Thompson's taste in guitars was moving from Gibsons to Fenders, and by the time he launched his solo career he had adopted the Fender Stratocaster. His second model, made in 1957, is to be heard on much of his post-Fairport work. Beginning with *I Want To See The Bright Lights Tonight* (1974) and ending with *Shoot Out The Lights* (1982), he enjoyed a singularly creative period with his wife, Linda, during which his fiery guitar-work was at its most exciting. His Strat-playing featured less in the unrecorded, medium-paced 'How I Wanted To', but his sinuous guitar-lines dominated the breathtakingly intense 'Night Comes In'. 'Shoot Out The Lights' in particular demonstrated his command of the instrument and awareness of dynamics. An instrumental album, *Strict Tempo!* (1981), showcased his acoustic interpretations of mainly traditional or folk material.

While primarily known as a guitarist, Thompson's sparing use of mandolin and mandocello has, on occasion, revealed another side of his musicianly skills; for example, on Dave Swarbrick's *Smiddyburn* (1981). He was co-author with Niles Hokkanen of *The Electric Mandolin* (1983), a tutor that adapted the techniques and vocabulary of the electric guitar for that instrument, utilising styles as diverse as jazz, rock'n'roll, blues and rockabilly. Thompson's guitar-playing, too, draws on a large reservoir of influences, encompassing traditional musics of many lands, religions and races, rock'n'roll, jazz, country and classical music. He cites abiding inspirations as Zoot Sims, Coleman Hawkins, Billy Pigg (the Northumbrian pipe-player), and guitarists like Django Reinhardt, 'Thumbs' Carlisle, Johnny Smith and James Burton. There is little doubt that Richard Thompson's many noteworthy recordings over one-and-a-half decades have entitled him to be listed alongside such distinguished company.

KEN HUNT


THE HISTORY OF
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